1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE II

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Girl in kraal (Kastura Gaajok)

[Face p. 16]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

CHAPTER VI

THE AGE-SET SYSTEM

I

All male Nuer are initiated from boyhood to manhood by a very severe operation (*gar*). Their brows are cut to the bone with a small knife, in six long cuts from ear to ear. The scars remain for life, and it is said that marks can be detected on the skulls of dead men. They are particularly clear in Plates XXVI(*b*), XXVII, and XXVIII. The ceremonial of initiation is more complex, and the age-set system has greater social importance among the Nuer than among other Sudan Nilotes.

We have described, and others have described, elsewhere the ritual of initiation. Though we have since collected further information on the details of the rites, we consider that to transcribe it here would be out of accord with the plan of this book. The barest facts are related. Boys are now usually initiated between the ages of 14 and 16; in the old days at a somewhat later age, perhaps from 16 to 18. Whether a boy is initiated in one year or in another year may depend on the milk and millet supply. A boy must obtain his father's consent to the operation, but it cannot well be refused, for the boy would then run away to the home of a kinsman and the father would be humiliated. He afterwards goes to a member of his father's age-set who performs a rite to give him the blessing of the set. A member of the clan likewise gives him its blessing, and his father and maternal uncle bless him. The boys make their own arrangements with the operator and each presents him with a fishing spear. The operator is any man who has learnt the art.

Several boys are initiated at the same time, for it is thought that were a boy to be initiated by himself he would be lonely and might die. Also, it is easier to cater for the boys and to give them the care and attention they require during convalescence if they are initiated in batches. Usually some four to a dozen boys pass through the rites together. Initiation can take place at any season, but it almost invariably takes place at the end of the rains, when there is plenty of food and the north wind blows and cicatrizes the wounds. Each village acts independently

: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE XXVII

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Initiation of boys (near Nasser, Eastern Gaajok)

[Face p. 250]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE XXVIII

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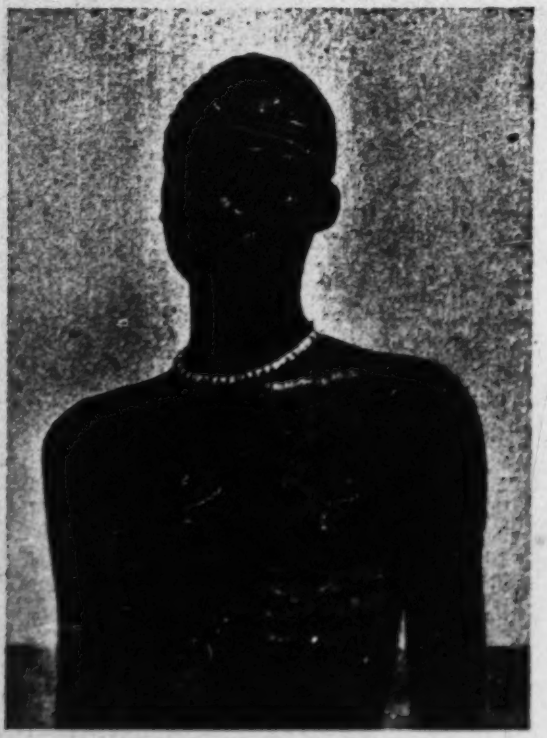

a. Youth (Zeraf river)

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b. Youth (Lou)

c. Man (Zeraf river)

[Face p. 256]

4; Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1948 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

of the husband's kinsfolk outside, who, squatting in front of it, likewise washes his hands in the water, and then fishes out the bracelet. The pot is returned to the hut and a different maiden and a different kinsman repeat the action of the first pair. All the close kinsfolk of the husband—his father's brothers and sisters, his mother's brothers and sisters, and his own brothers and sisters, and so on—are supposed to receive a bracelet, but, in fact, persons standing in some of these relationships will be absent and any person who can claim kinship with the husband can demand a bracelet. If a man's dip into the pot reveals a poor bracelet he does not hesitate to upbraid the girl who put it there and he may select a better one from those on her arm.

The concluding rite of the ceremony is the act from which it derives its name, the shaving of the wife's head (*mut nyior*) by a member of her husband's family. This may take place after the departure of her companions, for it is a domestic affair of the husband's *gol*, his home, of which the wife is now a member. The shaving of the head signifies this change in her status. People speak of the rite as *woi miem nyietde*, the removal of the hairs of maidenhood, and they say afterwards of the girl *Caa cek*, 'She has become a wife'. She is at the same time stripped of all her ornaments, which are divided among her husband's kin, and she is arrayed in new finery provided by her husband. She belongs to his, and not her father's, people now and it is for them to adorn her.

The Birth of a Child

The *mut* is the consummation of marriage, but not its completion, which is the birth of a child. The young wife is now called *cek ma kau*, a newly wed. Her parents give her a hut of her own and a sleeping-hide, a brush, and a couple of gourds for ablutions. When her husband comes to visit her in her father's homestead he sleeps with her in this hut. She continues in all other respects to lead the life she led before marriage, and after her husband's visits she hangs up the hide and domestic utensils and sleeps with her unmarried sisters. On these visits her husband stays at a neighbouring homestead as he cannot eat in the home of his parents-in-law and ought not to be seen there at all. When someone tells the wife that her husband has come, so that she may prepare for him, she feigns annoyance or lack of interest, pretending that she is still unmarried, a shyness she keeps up with third persons, though she is at ease when alone with her husband. When everyone is asleep he visits her and spends the night with her, leaving before any of the bride's people are about; her parents are supposed to know nothing of his visits, though, of course, they know all about his movements and it is even said that his mother-in-law may rise especially early and squint through a crack in the door of her hut in order to see him depart. Should he oversleep, and his mother-in-law sees his spears outside her daughter's hut, she makes them forfeit and he would be ashamed to ask for them back. It is not till a child has been born that the husband is accepted by his wife's people as one of themselves; he is then the father of their daughter's child and through the child has a kind of kinship link with them. Till this happens the husband continues to lead the life he lived before marriage, a bachelor life with his younger brothers in their father's byre. His wife visits him only on rare occasions and for a formal purpose, as when, at harvest time, she brings him coverings she has made for the grain on the drying-platforms, or when she takes him a bundle of well-cooked porridge made

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

585
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THE BRIDE

[facing p. 81]

8:Ho[illegible] E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

585
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THE BRIDEGROOM

[facing p. 160]

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

period (which lasts several years) and at the right time of the year. The right time is in the *jiom* (our winter) when there is plenty of food after the harvest and the north wind, which cicatrizes the wounds, is blowing. But a boy may be initiated also in what corresponds to our springtime. I have no knowledge of initiation being restricted to a few days during which hundreds of boys are initiated, as Jackson gives one to suppose: "Some two hundred boys can be initiated in a day, each boy having the operation begun and completed on the same day. The doctors move from village to village where the boys are collected."[1]

The boy himself makes arrangements with the operator to cut his marks of manhood. There are a large number of these operators and there seems no reason why anyone should not practise if he has the necessary skill. The boy takes a fishing spear to the operator and presents it to him. With this is dug the hole into which the blood will flow and it afterwards becomes the property of the operator.

The operation takes place in the early morning before the sun is high, and the head is prepared on the previous day. It is closely shaved at midday since it is not considered well to shave the head in the morning. Just before the cutting the forehead is well washed with water and is rubbed with pancreas (*bŏl*) (*ba nhiamde cuth ka bŏl*) and finally with dust (*tup*). A hole (*koahviem*) is dug to receive the blood and in this the head rests on a grass circle (*thac*). After the operation is completed this hole is filled in with earth as it is thought a bad thing for the blood to remain exposed lest a dog or other animal might eat it. The cutting takes place in front of a hut or byre, and I was told that it would be highly improper for it to take place outside the homestead, for the boys' blood should be spilt in the homestead itself. Mothers and fathers and relatives and friends, even girl friends, watch the boys undergoing their ordeal. Tradition lays it down that a boy must show no signs of fear before or during the operation but often the ordeal is so terrible that their nerves give way. It is said that some boys will defaecate with fear and pain, and some have been known to struggle and even to run away, though when this happens they are held down with force and their relatives are occasioned great shame. It is common for boys to faint during the operation and then their heads are slightly raised and milk is poured down their throats to revive them. Nevertheless as a rule boys display admirable

[1] *Op cit*, p. 143.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

courage and betray neither fear nor pain, fortitude assisted by the presence of relatives whom they do not wish to disgrace and girls whose favours they hope to win.

The first cut is the most painful, probably because it severs the supra-orbital nerves. It is known as the *woc doki* (the wiping out of boyhood) and runs just above the eyebrows right across the temples. The second cut is made just above the first and is called *guec mun dwiel* because before initiation if a boy were hungry he would go to the entrance of his mother's hut and ask for food, whereas after initiation, when he has become a man, he will not plead for food but will sit quietly and bear the pangs of hunger. Altogether six cuts are made from the centre of the forehead to level with the right ear and the operator then completes them by commencing from the incisions at the centre of the forehead and cutting to level with the left ear. There are thus six parallel cuts running right across the temple from ear to ear.

The best description of the operation is given by Miss Huffman who has witnessed it and whose account I give here rather than my own which is based on oral accounts. "A hole from four to six inches in diameter and about six or eight inches deep is dug for each boy. The earth which is taken out of the hole is pulverized and spread around the hole in order that it may absorb the blood. Women and girls attired in their dance skirts rush in, singing and dancing. One boy is called. He comes out, stark naked, not even wearing a bead. He lies down on his back with his head in the hole. He folds his arms over his chest and then he is ready. The man, kneeling beside him, begins to cut. He starts at the centre of the forehead and extends the cut to or even past the ear. The first cut is made just above the eyes, then the remaining cuts are made parallel to it until they are six in number. Then the man goes over to the left side and, kneeling there, repeats the same process. Then he returns to the right side and makes sure that all the cuts are deep and continuous at the centre of the forehead and that they are six in number..... As one is finished another boy is called until all lie there, still and bleeding. Usually everything is very quiet when the actual cutting is going on, the only sound heard being the grating of the knife on the bone. The boy lies there until the bleeding has stopped, then he is helped into the house. He crawls into the house on his hands and feet, but with his back next to the ground and tries to hold his head and body in a horizontal position....."[1]

[1] Ray Huffman, "Nuer Customs and Folk-lore," 1931, pp. 30-31.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

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As soon as the cutting is finished the boys go and sit in front of the hut before which the operation has taken place. If they are able to do so they walk unaided with their heads held back from the shoulder. Otherwise they are assisted. Seated with their backs to the hut and with their heads held back they wave away flies from their lacerated foreheads. Meanwhile their mothers and the other women present utter ceremonial cries of joy as they dance in front of them (*le yi wa kuk*).

The lines cut are six in number but occasionally one meets men with seven cuts. Father Crazzolara says that this is due to the fact that the operator "in his artistic elation, forgets to count, and adds one or two lines beyond the number demanded by the fashion that prevails at the time."[1] This does not seem to me a very likely explanation. In Lou country I was invariable told that when two brothers were initiated at the same time the youngest received seven cuts, a statement borne out by the several cases I was able to investigate. A youth from Lek country on the Bahr-el-Ghazal who had seven cuts on his forehead told me that it was the custom in his tribe for the eldest son in a family to receive an extra cut but I was unable to check his statement from other informants. Miss Huffman writes that sometimes the operator "happens to be a very dear friend of the boy and may honour him by cutting seven cuts instead of the customary six."[2]

I do not think that there is any need to emphasize the severity of the ordeal, which may readily be understood from Father Crazzolara's statement that the cuts are distinctly visible on the skulls of dead Nuer. It is surprising therefore that it does not often result in death. Yet I have never heard of a boy dying during or after the operation though I made enquiries on the point, and the staff of the American Mission at Nasser told me that in their long experience of the country they had never heard of a fatal operation. Father Crazzolara on the other hand states that death is not infrequent.[3]

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On the day on which a boy is initiated from four to ten pots of beer

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 52. "Es will vorkommen, dass der Gurmeister manchmal in Eifer für seine Kunst, das Zählen vergisst, und eine oder zwei Linien mehr ausführt als das Gesetz verlangt. Darnegen wird vielfach ein Jünglüng aufgemuntert, der darauf zu achten hat, dass der Meister nicht mehr als wenig gepaukt werde."

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

[3] "Die meisten sq bis 28 Stunden sind die erwachsenen, wegen der Gefahr des Verblutens. Es ist keine Seltenheit, dass ein alter Mann, der nachts oder in alter Frühe nachhause kommt, einen der Knaben niederdrückt, ja in der Todesstarre antrifft." *Id.*, p. 52.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

beads similar to those worn by the men, strings of beads 301
over each shoulder and under the opposite arm, and many strands around her waist. As she nears the marriageable age she has numerous strands of *giraffe* hair—with various pendants—about her neck.

She may also bleach her hair and wear brass bracelets [302]
on her arm. But she does not wear nearly as many of these brass bracelets as her brother, nor does she wear them as tightly, for no matter how much she may wish for ornaments, she must do her work of pounding the dura and must not incapacitate her arm for that work. None the less, the bracelets give many a girl a sore.

Wristlets are also made of giraffe hair with beads of various colours strung on the various hairs. These are quite pretty and add a bright bit of colour to a girl's arm. She usually wears a spiked bracelet—even the small children wear them—and they are a dangerous weapon when they are angry with one another, and wish to strike.

The Nuer girl has a hole pierced in the centre of her 301
upper lip. She may wear a blade of grass, a flower, or a 304
small stick of wood in it, but usually she wears a nail with the point sticking outward.

The ears of a girl are pierced in from five to seven places along the outer edge. This is done with a sharp-pointed native needle, and then little sticks or straws are worn in the holes in order to keep them open. The ears are frequently very sore and sometimes quite painful and slow in healing after this operation. The ears are usually pierced before the girl is in her teens, part of the holes being pierced at one time, the remainder when the first sores caused by the piercing are well. She often wears bead or grass ornaments in them. But the object of this is that the ears may be ready for the white beads which will be put in them when the girl is married. If

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

301 she has not already had her ears pierced, her husband
304 or his people may pierce all the places in both ears at once and put in the white beads that are the insignia of her married state. Whether her ears are sore or not, she must wear these white beads that proclaim her married status to all who see her.

301 Bands of beads may be worn on the upper arm or just below the knee. Sometimes strings of beads several inches in length are attached as pendants.

Feathers are frequently worn in the hair and sometimes in the lowest holes that are pierced in the ears. Sometimes a quill is worn in the upper lip.

[151] A newborn baby is not very old before it is attired in bead anklets, wristlets, or a necklace with charms to keep the evil eye away from the child. A strand of beads around the waist, sometimes with a tiny bell as pendant, may be worn. As the child grows older, if a girl, anklets of wire are put on. Also any little child may be seen with wristlets of wire. Shells or beads may be tied to the hair.

302 If an only child, the hair may all be cut except five little tufts, one being at top of head, one at each side, and one at the centre back and front.

301 Wooden beads are also worn by babies. No clothing
291 is worn unless some dress has been received as a gift and donned for special occasions—especially if the donor be present. The mother covers the tiny baby with her cloth if she possesses one.

301 As the child grows older, he wears more beads, either the wooden beads or those purchased of the merchant. But he wears no girdle hair until—if a boy—he has the six tribal marks cut. A girl when nearing the age of puberty, or even younger, may begin to wear girdle hair.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Chapter Four

CUTTING THE TRIBAL MARKS

DETAILS OF THE RITE

BY far the most important event in the life of a Nuer boy comes when he has about reached the age of puberty. His people decide that he must have the tribal marks (Fig. 1) cut when the cold winds blow. He knows that now, at least for a short time, he will be the centre of attraction in his village. The younger boys follow after him; he enjoys their admiration and envy.

He has his hair shaved off, not a spear of hair must be left. He removes all his clothing, if he has any, and beads. Ornaments of all kinds, every one of them, must be discarded.

Some men are known to be expert at cutting the tribal marks and they are much in demand as the season of cold winds approaches, for each year there are usually boys in each locality who must have the tribal marks cut and the services of some one who is an adept at the work is required.

Usually this rite is executed upon several boys at the same time and place, so that they may find companionship in the company of each other while they recuperate from this dreadful ordeal. For ordeal it is, no matter how much they try to bolster up their courage.

The boys are allotted a house in which to sleep the night before this rite takes place. Sometimes they secure the kind of pillow which is used by Nuer women, a ring of cane-leaves having a hole in the centre. They practice sleeping on it, for they must use that kind of a pillow until their wounds heal.

The night passes, but little sleeping is done. Before daybreak the people are stirring, for the man who will

881 cut the tribal marks comes at or before sunrise in order
304 that the ordeal may be over and the boys safely back in the house before the heat of the day begins.

The boys remain in the house, awaiting their call, so that no one with the evil eye may see them.

The girl friends of the boys are also *en route* before sunrise, so that they may see how bravely the boys act when suffering so intensely. The women of the village don their long grass dancing skirts.

A hole from four to six inches in diameter and about six or eight inches deep is dug for each boy. The earth which is taken out of the hole is pulverized and spread around the hole in order that it may absorb the blood. Women and girls attired in their dance skirts rush in, singing and dancing.

One boy is called. He comes out, stark naked, not even wearing a bead. He lies down on his back with his head in the hole. He folds his arms over his chest and then he is ready.

The man, kneeling beside him, begins to cut. He starts at the centre of the forehead and extends the cut to or even past the ear. The first cut is made just above the eyes, then the remaining cuts are made parallel to it until they are six in number. Then the man goes over to the left side and, kneeling there, repeats the same process. Then he returns to the right side and makes sure that all of the cuts are deep and continuous at the centre of the forehead, and that they are six in number.

The boy usually lies absolutely still, for a show of fear on his part would bring ridicule from the girls and women that would be hard to bear, and if he moves it will mean that the cut will not be straight and he will always have to wear a scar that will proclaim to any Nuer that he flinched while the tribal marks were being cut.

As one is finished another boy is called until all lie there, still and bleeding. Usually everything is very quiet when the actual cutting is going on, the only sound heard being the grating of the knife upon the bone. 831 804

The boy lies there until the bleeding has stopped, then he is helped into the house. He crawls into the house on his hands and feet, but with his back next to the ground and tries to hold his head and body in a horizontal position. The man who cuts these tribal marks is supposed to stay for a while if he can, in case there should be haemorrhage.

If there should be haemorrhage, pressure and the application of cow-manure ash is tried to relieve it. Also fear is expressed that some one with the evil eye must have seen the boy or else there would have been no haemorrhage. [752] [704]

Soon after the tribal marks are cut a sheep is sacrificed in order to insure safe healing of the cuts. A little later a mock fight is staged between the men and the women of the village in which the women are allowed to use clubs, but the men must defend themselves bare-handed.

The boy is carefully guarded against the evil eye. He wears a piece of sheepskin over his head, this piece of sheepskin usually being one part, the back section, of a married woman's garb which has been given for this purpose. No one is supposed to view the cuts until they are healed, but the boy usually gives some trusted friend an opportunity to see them.

After some days the cuts are washed, but not immediately, for the clotted blood is left undisturbed for some time.

The boy usually carries a large cluster of feathers as a fan in order to keep the flies away from his head.

He is the centre of attraction at his village now. All visitors to the village are met at a little distance and their

77/ names announced before they may come near, for the evil
304 eye must constantly be guarded against.

An animal skin is always spread on the ground for him to sit on. Food is specially prepared for him in order that he may speedily regain his strength and vigour again. He is treated as a most honoured guest in the village, and is the centre of concern.

Later on the boy is supposed to give some gift to the man who cut the tribal marks for him. Sometimes this man happens to be a very dear friend of the boy and may honour him by cutting seven cuts instead of the customary six.

The boy takes cane-stalks and peels them, cutting them into four-inch lengths. He makes a girdle or belt of them by fastening them together side by side. He may go visiting at night after his wounds are well on the way to recovery, and he always wears this belt. He also carries a long stick which has a piece of ambatch or other light wood at the end of it, and also a cluster of white feathers.

He is not allowed to go among the cattle until he is entirely well. When one asks him if his wounds are healed he will always say 'not yet', but one may find out if they are really healed by asking him if he has gone among the cattle. If not, the wounds are still sore, but if he has been with the cattle it means that the wounds are well healed, although the boy will not say so for fear some one with the evil eye should hear of it.

[vi] No pregnant woman must come near the boy until his wounds are healed; a man whose wife is pregnant must also be avoided.

301 Nuers do not wear bead necklaces after the tribal marks are cut, although strands of beads may be worn around the waist or over each shoulder and under the opposite arm. Wooden beads may be worn for a few months, then they may wear the girdle hair necklaces.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

One cannot but admire the bravery and stoicism displayed by the boy, but it is a dreadful ordeal and a most gruesome sight. How long this custom will be continued is a question one cannot answer. Knowing the Nuer, one would be almost tempted to say that it will never be discontinued as long as there remains one Nuer boy unmarked. Yet one Christian boy showed definitely that he had not the same fear of the evil eye as his companions. But until the Nuer people as a whole become Christians, there seems to be but little hope that this dreadful practice will be discontinued.

Near Akwong the tribal marks are not cut as deeply as they are at Nasser, and heal much more quickly.

A mother who has borne six or seven sons may have these tribal marks cut on her forehead at the same time as her youngest son has his cut. It is considered a great honour.

One may occasionally see a woman who has from one to four cuts across her forehead, but that indicates that she has had severe eye trouble, and the cuts have been made to relieve that condition. The cuts are on the forehead only, and do not extend to the region above the ears.

At least one Nuer—a man—is an albino. His hair, unbleached, is flaxen. His skin is pink-white. I have heard that other members of the same family are albinos, although some of them are black, but I have seen but this one member of the family. His parents are black. Nuer have always been afraid of him, fearing that he has a god in him.

When he was old enough to have the tribal marks cut, no one wanted to cut them, for they feared this god that was supposed to be in him. But the boy was insistent, so finally he had the tribal marks cut, but they were

Chapter Five

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE AND THE BABY

PREPARATION AND CHOICE

583 PROBABLY the most important event in the life of a Nuer girl is her courtship and marriage.

Her thoughts, even when a child, are upon her future husband, who he may be, what he may pay as the marriage price. Of course she often hears the village talk of how many cattle may be received for her. Sometimes her father or her brothers need cattle to help them out of financial difficulties incurred possibly through their own marriage plans. So they arrange the girl's marriage while she is yet a little girl and secure an initial payment of a cow or two in order to help them out. The husband does not take the girl to his village then but waits until she is older, and then he must pay the rest of the wedding price for her. Sometimes this man may be young, but more often he is an older man who has the cattle to help her father out of his extremity. And this older man may be planning to take her for his second or third wife, or possibly to get her for a wife for his son.

304 301 During her younger years she must have each ear pierced in from five to seven places along the outer edge, and she must have her upper lip pierced in the centre in order to wear a nail in it. When she is first taken to her husband's home white beads, as has already been noted, must be put in her ears, which will proclaim her status as a married woman to all who see her.

857 During her girlhood she must learn all the tasks that fall to woman's lot.

301 As she nears marriageable age she adorns her body with all the beads, anklets, wristlets, necklaces of various

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

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Fig. 2. Tribal markings on forehead

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Fig. 3. A carved gourd

[facing p. 49]

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

may generally be traced to a source outside the Nuer. 164
The Nuer have a superstition that dreadful things may happen—the nose may rot away, the head may split down the back—if they contract syphilis. Probably this superstition more than anything else tends to keep them from contracting the disease.

Gonorrhea, like syphilis, is not very common. It, too, may not infrequently be traced to a source which has no connection with the Nuer.

Children and the aged often suffer from malnutrition 146
owing to their limited diet.

A Nuer child has the six central lower teeth removed 753
when he is about six or eight years old. They frequently 752
think that some illness the child has had is due to the teeth, 304
and so have them extracted. Even though there be no illness the teeth are removed while the child is little. There is no such thing in Nuerland as painless extraction of teeth, judging from the cries we have heard and sore mouths we have seen.

Broken bones are also not infrequent, tiny splints for 752
them are made out of cane stalk or some small twigs of a pliable wood. These are placed side by side and laced together, the splint thus formed being tied around the limb at the site of the broken bone.

Spear wounds are occasionally to be seen, but if they are the result of a fight, they are seldom brought to the clinic for medical treatment. The wound is cared for by the relatives of the injured person in the village so that the evil eye may not see the wound and retard its healing.

The art of the medicine man is often sought in order to 755
cure any disease that baffles ordinary treatment. He (or she, as the case may be, for women are also adepts at this art) may remove (?) various things from the throat and stomach, and thereby relieve (?) the cause of distress.

15: Butt E-4 (No date) 1952 F 322 Nuer F 322

AGE-SET ORGANISATION

INITIATION

Formerly boys were initiated at the age of 16 to 18, each village making its arrangements independently. The ceremony usually takes place after the rains. The officer in charge of initiation into age sets is the wut ghok (the man of the cattle). He opens the period when initiation may take place, 'when the knife is brought out' (ngun kam rur) and closes it 'when the knife is hung up' (ko ngun ngak). At the beginning of an initiation period the cattle expert kills a bullock, a big dance is held and he makes a speech opening a new period of initiation. In each tribe there is a cattle expert whose seniority is acknowledged in matters concerning age-set organisation.

At the initiation ceremony 6 deep cuts are made across the forehead of the boy, extending from ear to ear. After the cutting (gar) the boys, who suffer great pain, are shut up in a hut for two days. There is a period of confinement (lasting one to two weeks) which is followed by one of mild licence. During the whole of this time the initiates must strictly avoid any contact with cattle. Finally, cleansing ceremonies are carried out and a concluding ceremony and dance. After this the youths are recognised as adults and enter into normal adult life and affairs, and into lifelong contact with the herds.

AGE SETS

All boys initiated during a number of successive years belong to a single age set (ric). Until recently there was a four years' interval between the end of one set and the beginning of the next, and this was the period when the man of the cattle hung up his knife and no more initiations were held.

The age sets are organised independently in each tribe, but it often happens that, when a new set has been started in one tribe, an adjacent tribe will follow suit.[1] A set usually lasts for two years before being cut and there are generally members of six sets alive at any one time. The names of the sets are not uniform for the whole of Nuerland, and they are not repeated. Each age set has two or three subdivisions, each with a separate name. Subdivisions are made up of those initiated together in one year or possibly the combined initiates of two years. All the members of a set are known by the name of the first division. At initiation the individual enters the set in which he will remain for the rest of his life. The members of a set have a common name, equal status, and observe certain patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior sets (see below p.168).

The sets are not specifically graded as boys, warriors, and elders, as in some forms of age-set organisation, nor have they any political, juridical or military functions. Their importance is of a social nature in that a person's position in the age-set structure determines his social behaviour. Milking and other women's work is forbidden to a youth after

(1) Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, (Ms), p.250.

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owner killed a man of another district, he began a feud and was liable to be killed by the kin of his victim. It seems that fetish owners were treated differently in different areas. Many people possess medicines which protect them from fetishes. 754

Death may be due to one of three causes: *ole kwoth* (a sickness of god), sorcery and the evil eye, or sickness due to fetishes. This last is sudden and may kill a man quickly, whereas a sickness sent by god is usually prolonged.[1] A man believing himself to be ill on account of a fetish summons a fetish owner to discover whose fetish is responsible. When this is known a sacrifice is made to the fetish and its owner is asked to stop it troubling the sick man. 754 755

When a fetish owner dies, his medicines are preserved until his spirit enters into one of his descendants who will then become a fetish owner in his stead. A man may purchase a fetish from another; the medicine is only the habitation of the fetish spirits who exist apart from it. The Nuer believe that a fetish kills someone because its owner dislikes him. 754

The Nuer Ghost

Many of the Nilotic tribes believe in ghosts who feed on the bodies of those recently dead. This belief is found among the Acholi, Anuak, Shilluk, Lango, Dinka and Nuer. The Nuer ghost is called the *ruth* and is regarded with horror by the people. The practice of ghoulish activities is to some extent hereditary, for the potentiality is found in certain lineages, but a man may become a *ruth* even if he is not a member of such a lineage. Disinterment of the dead is regarded as his most horrible activity.

A *ruth* may be killed by common consent and, although no blood must be spilt, he may be beaten to death with sticks without fear of revenge. This is the only instance among the Nuer of killing which does not demand compensation or vengeance.

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

In childbirth a woman is attended by a female relative who is herself already a mother. The child's incisor teeth are removed at the age of eight years. 754 754 304

The birth of twins constitutes a danger to their family; special observances are made by the kinsmen, animals are sacrificed, and ritual prohibitions observed. As do other Nilotic groups, the Nuer believe that the parents are safe if the twins are of opposite sexes, for the boy will cease to persecute his father and the girl her mother. In spite of the dangers, however, the Nuer are joyful at the birth of twins if they both live. Throughout life, twins are subject to certain ritual observances; before a twin can get married they must both together go through a functional 396 682

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *E.N.*, 1933, p.14.